Garnet Falls

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/10224500.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Margot Verger, Winston (Hannibal)
Additional Tags:	Established Relationship, Recreational Drug Use, but just like mild drug use, just a lil for fun, Kidnapped Will Graham, Hannibal to the Rescue, Dark, very dark, based on irl serial killers
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Carnal Knowledge
Stats:	Published: 2017-03-11 Words: 5,270 Chapters: 1/?

Garnet Falls

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Summary

Will's intuition leads him to the place where a pair of sexual sadists are murdering women for sport.

Things don't go as planned.

Notes

Hey...more soon.

Gets pretty graphic later on.

Part of a series but can be read as a standalone.

They still smelled like the woods.

Will stood among the slabs in the morgue, Price and Zeller silent behind him. Fluorescent lights hummed and his own breathing echoed in his ears.

And the nearer he drew the better he could see the maple bark and yellow birch, the soft earth carpeted in slender leaves, snails clinging bodily to their wet undersides.

“How long were they in the ground?” he asked after a long moment of thought.

“The baby and the dad were down for about eight months. The mom, four.”

Will’s jaw tightened and he nodded.

“What’s her COD?”

“Double-barrel round of buckshot,” Price returned softly, nearly at whisper. “Bastard put it in her, ah…”

“The other two, the...the gunshot wounds, in the head.”

“Right.”

“Will —”

Zeller gestured abortively as the other brushed past him, stepping into the hall. The door swung shut, and they listened to him retch.

Jack found him sitting impassively in a mostly-empty corridor on the sixth floor, watching rain course over the tinted windowpane.

He stood before Will with his hands in his pockets.

“You read the file?”

Will nodded without making eye contact.

“See what they found in the two girls?”

“I did, Jack, yeah. Hard to miss.”

“How do you figure tungsten got --”

“It was a lightbulb,” Will muttered through his hands. His head sank down further into his palms. “An old lightbulb. They put it -- and her muscles broke it.”

Jack winced. They were used to anatomical terms in their line of work. But since the cluster of seven bodies — a mother, father and infant plus four unrelated females in their mid twenties — had been discovered in the western Vermont woods, they had all grown collectively uneasy with the usual words. Vaginal tearing and severe perforation of the rectum no longer seemed to encompass the depravity of what had happened.

“We’ll get him, Graham.”

“Them,” Will supplied flatly.

“Them? How do you know there’s a them?”

“These girls were held for weeks at a time, Jack. The — the scabs, the old wounds, the dog food in the intestines...There was overlap with some of them. Keeping two or three girls at a time, there’s no way it’s just one guy.”

“Pretty rare for two sexual sadists to work together.”

“Nobody likes to be lonely.”

They decided to give up, temporarily, around nine in the evening.

“I got nothing,” Price said at length, reclining from the lens of the microscope with a weary, tight sigh. He rolled his shoulders and then his neck; Will didn’t think he had ever seen him in such low spirits.

“Nothing?” Zeller scowled, “I mean, nothing? No partials, no —”

“Bupkis.”

Price leaned back in his chair, thought for a moment, then shook his head.

“I gotta get home. It’s late. Tomorrow’s gonna be early.”

Will nodded as though the idea had just occurred to him.

“Yeah, I think — same.”

Bev slid her goggles off and let her ponytail down as she slung her bag over her shoulder.

“Anybody wanna get drinks?”

Will thought about it. Her instinct was good. He needed something to clear his head, or else he would spend all night soaked in sweat grappling with some shape in the Vermont woods.

It would take more than a beer or five.

“I better get home,” Will said, muttering something about his dogs. He tugged his coat on and laid his scarf around his neck, letting it hang loose as he wound his way out through the

bowels of the building and into the cool October night.

Getting to Baltimore from Quantico required a detour around D.C. There were enough intolerably bourgeois wine bars in the middle of downtown open past ten for a city ten times the size of the capital, but at least he wouldn't show up empty-handed.

He wound up parked illegally on the street in Chinatown, rushing into some hip looking joint with his wallet in hand.

"Hey, could I just, ah, buy a bottle...to-go?"

The maitre'd seemed less than thrilled. Will wondered if he had shouldered somebody out of the way.

"We usually don't —"

He happened, then, to catch the eye of the sommelier, whose overstuffed silk suit gave him away. Will waved him over.

"Hey, if you could just — it's for," he leaned in as the man drew up, frowning, " — Doctor Lecter."

It would either mean something to them or they'd think he was crazier than they already did; but a look of recognition passed between wine steward and hostess like electricity, and Will left $96 poorer with a bottle of some Swiss red that couldn't possibly be worth that much, unless, he thought, he wound up so thoroughly fucked out he slept for eighteen hours straight, dream-free.

It was long past suppertime when he stood in the clear autumn darkness on Hannibal's porch and rapped heavily on the door. It never took a sound as loud as he thought it should to alert Hannibal; the man had the ears and nose of a panther, not to mention the appetite.

"Will," Hannibal greeted him easily, already dressed down for the evening, "what an unexpected surprise."

He thrust out his host gift, the conspicuously unwrapped bottle of Swiss wine, and stepped inside without a proper invitation. Hannibal stood aside, placid, and took his coat and wine.

"Ah, a Cornalin du Valais. I should've known you're the adventurous type," he mused, scanning the label. Will handed over his scarf.

"I had to name-drop you. Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," Hannibal answered pleasantly. "You're welcome to make use of my name anytime you like." He paused for a beat as Will finished shucking off his outerwear and stepped closer, traces of cold air still clinging to his skin. "At any volume," Hannibal added, and then kissed him, one hand on his waist, the other balancing the bottle of wine.

Will allowed for the brief kiss at the door, but pulled back to pat gently at Hannibal's shoulder and walk further into the house towards the kitchen lest he direct them too quickly towards the bedroom.

"What makes this particular wine so adventurous?" He traced his fingertips over the edge of a table with a flower arrangement in the hall and meandered slowly into the well-lit kitchen. It wouldn't seem like a visit to Hannibal's house if he didn't end up in the kitchen at some point in time.

Hannibal followed without complaint, pouring the wine into a sloping crystal wine decanter as soon as he arrived in the kitchen. He passed the cork to Will.

"Cornalin du Valais is a rare breed of grape. Wild and ancient, much less domesticated than the typical fruit. Accordingly a good Cornalin is...difficult. Bitter, tannic, full-bodied and oftentimes a little thick...spicy, I'd say. Dark figs under the sweeter plum currents. Well, you'll just have to try it."

He bent at the waist and withdrew a copper and chrome pot which he fixed over a burner on the stove. A click of the pilot and a low blue flame sprang up; Hannibal, meanwhile, tied on his half-apron.

"You seem due for refreshment, Will," he observed, "something on your mind?"

Will continued to fiddle with the cork in his hand while Hannibal made to start cooking. The corners of his mouth turned down as he smelled again and considered Hannibal's question.

"I could eat, but I'm not starving. You've probably eaten dinner already." He knew it wouldn't deter Hannibal from preparing whatever he already had it in his mind to cook.

"Nothing really on my mind," Will watched as Hannibal turned about the kitchen, bringing a tray of various cheeses from the refrigerator and a suitable white wine from a few bottles set out on the counter for cooking. He set the wine by the pot and grabbed four chunks of cheese to place on his cutting board before replacing two of the four back onto the tray for storage and beginning to grate the two that he had kept. Hannibal's forearms were bare, and Will watched appreciatively as the tendons flexed.

"I have a case. Everybody's...troubled by it. Bev asked me if I wanted to go out to drink earlier today...before I came here."

"Oh yes?" A fragrant splash of the white wine simmered in the pot, followed by a crushed clove or two of garlic. Hannibal began mounding the grated cheese into a mixing bowl, followed by a dusting of flour. "Do tell."

"Police found a burial site in North Country just off of the highway. Seven bodies so far, but it's clear they'd been spooked. The missing persons reports show that the burial site must have been abandoned about a month ago. They've moved," Will set the cork aside and removed two glasses from Hannibal's cupboard. He poured them each a small amount for tasting and took a sip first, hoping to save Hannibal from his gift if it proved to be a dud. He

was pleasantly surprised, but only poured himself a modest half glass before setting the decanter back down. Hannibal had been right. It was very strong.

Hannibal set his work aside for a brief moment to taste; it required his full attention. He fixed his eyes on Will's, watching the flickering currents of emotion as he raised his glass to his lips, inhaled, and swallowed.

"Perfect, Will," he breathed on the edge of a moan. "Excellent."

He had said the very same words before, in different settings. Hannibal returned to his chopping with a pleasant warmth spreading through him. As the cheese and wine melted together he split dried figs and candied walnuts, then tart green apples and plums. Bread warmed in the oven.

"A pair of killers working together?" he asked lightly, "How unusual."

Will regarded Hannibal over the edge of his glass with narrowed eyes. Hannibal never dealt in sarcasm. His tone was never snide, but Will knew better.

"Stranger than a pair of killers working together, is a pair of sexual sadists working together," Will waited for Hannibal to counter as he knew he would.

"Strange," Hannibal granted, "but not unheard of, especially in certain scenarios...in the army, fraternities, prisons, gangs...Do you suppose they're in love?"

Will recoiled when Hannibal suggested it, "How do you figure? If they were in love there would be...easier ways to develop intimacy."

"Perhaps it isn't the killing, or perhaps the killing is incidental. It could be that they need the victims to act as surrogates for intimacy they can't enjoy together. It wouldn't do for a surrogate to be a person herself, so they dehumanize them."

He paused, arraying figs and plums on a slab of marble. The wine simmered, and Hannibal stirred it.

"So much madness issues from self-denial," he added, softly, an afterthought. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." Cheese joined the wine and garlic, and Hannibal watched Will with unveiled interest, leaning on his forearms.

"Madness is madness. I'm not particularly concerned with what it stems from. My job is to find where it leads. Usually it's less a 'palace of wisdom' and more a mountain of depravity," Will grabbed an apple from the cutting board and considered stirring it through the cheese in the pot, but refrained when Hannibal turned a dark eye on him.

He chuckled low and held his hands up in surrender as he chewed and swallowed what was in his mouth.

"I suppose I can't chastise you for impatience when I've counseled you against self-denial," Hannibal muttered. Minx went unspoken, but showed in the quirk of his lips.

A few moments later the cheese had melted and the fondue was ready, following, of course, a microplane dusting of fresh nutmeg. Hannibal offered Will a fondue fork and took one up himself, toasting the evening with a half-full glass of wine.

Will went to the oven and used the towel hanging on the handlebar to take the bread out. “I wonder,” he pulled a wooden carving board and serrated knife from the opposite counter and placed them on the one closer to the fondue pot, “if two sexual sadists can really work together.”

He began cutting the bread into smaller chunks and shook the knife as he theorized, “Sadism and dominance usually go hand in hand.” Will went back to his side of the fondue pot and covered a piece of bread with cheese. He held it until it cooled and chewed thoughtfully with only a quiet mmmm to speak to his approval of the night’s fare. “That being said, for two to be working in tandem -- there has to be a submissive partner,” Will shook his head dismissively, “But a submissive sadist?”

“Of course,” Hannibal answered, giving him an emphatic nod. Will’s audible pleasure with the food gratified him, and it showed in the quickness of his eyes. “Sadism correlates with dominance and masochism with submission. But they can be divorced and rematched on occasion. There are dominant masochists; men who like, for instance, their partners to fight them viciously. And there are submissive sadists, the sort who like to be directed to inflict pain by others.”

Hannibal swirled a dried fig in cheese and watched Will with a curious gaze, as though the subject of their conversation were entirely ordinary.

“Anyway,” Will drummed his fingers on the counter and placed a cheese covered walnut in the center of a plum, “they’re searching New York since they found the bodies in North Country.” Will leaned in conspiratorially and ate half of the piece of plum in one bite. “But I think they’re working out of Vermont. All of the victims are from New York except the family. The victimology is different, but clearly the same MO.”

Will pulled the stool next to him closer and relaxed into it as he took a sip of his wine. He crossed the arm not holding his wine glass over his chest, “Family was supposed to be vacationing just outside of New Haven when they disappeared. Aberrations are...significant.”

“Mm,” Hannibal agreed, savoring a mouthful of wine. “It seems you have the case fairly well in hand, Will.”

And he did. He could read exhaustion in Will’s bearing and demeanor but not frustration; not yet, anyhow.

“I doubt you came here just for my expert consultation.” His voice had dropped but remained smooth and easy. He found Will’s eyes with his and languidly held his gaze, idly swirling his wine in his palm.

Will considered lying, but he couldn’t see how it would benefit him to deny the truth when he really had come here for other reasons.

He cracked a toothy smile and looked into the bottom of his own glass, “I guess I came here to see you. Make an appeal…” Will gestured toward the bottle of wine with an outstretched pinky.

Hannibal’s brows lifted; he was excited to find Will in such a playful mood.

“And now,” he teased, “you are appealing.”

Hannibal’s nose was too sensitive for anything like incense. The lower floor of his house smelled clean and often herbal or savory thanks to the presence of his oft-used kitchen; the upstairs, though, was cooler and dimmer and smelled of pine and cedar and aging books. It calmed Will.

He started unbuttoning his shirt as soon as they entered Hannibal’s room. Of course the bed was made; he relished disturbing the rich duvet as he sat down, toeing off his shoes. When he leaned over to roll his socks off he slid open the lower nightstand drawer on his way up, and laid the lube on the nightstand.

“Did you always….dress like this?”

Hannibal appeared in the doorway to his closet divested of his jacket and waistcoat, fingers leisurely loosening his tie.

“Like this?” He prompted Will.

“You know. Like...ah, upscale, I’d say.”

“Not always,” Hannibal said lightly, disappearing back into his closet. It was the cryptic sort of reply that made Will eager to follow him, and he did, wandering past the carefully arrayed suit of samurai armor to peer at Hannibal’s immense wardrobe.

Here he could watch him undress, a three-paned triptych mirror behind him as he opened the buttons of his shirt. Will remembered that he, too, should be undressing; he shrugged his shirt off and threw it over the chair Hannibal had carefully draped his jacket over.

Will ran his fingertips along the sleeves of Hannibal’s collection of hanging suits.

“Where do you even buy stuff like this?”

“I have them made, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Grown men should have their clothes tailored, Will.”

“Bet I could feed all my dogs for a year with what you pay for…” his fingers caught a rough-feeling fabric at the very edge of the closet different from the others, a threadbare, worn texture, almost like canvas or burlap. “...one of these.”

Of course the pause didn't escape Hannibal. He was over Will's shoulder at once, bereft now of shirt and tie, sliding his belt out of its loops. Will shivered.

"Go ahead, Will," he invited him, "have a look."

Will tugged the shoulder of the jacket and slid it outward. It lacked the sheen of Hannibal's other suits, and seemed cut in a different shape altogether; the color was a dull, greyed blue, with red and gold epaulets marked with stars. Just under the lapel a silver medal was suspended from a gently frayed red ribbon. It bore a single red star encircled by a wreath of leaves.

"This...doesn't seem tailored..." Will ventured sheepishly.

"Certainly not well," Hannibal provided, settling his hands on Will's naked shoulders. Will's eyes wandered over the uniform — though he was increasingly distracted. He could almost place the emblems, but not quite…

When Hannibal applied his mouth to his neck, he lost his concentration entirely.

"If you want me to guess, you're going to have to stop that," Will placed his hands on top of Hannibal's at his shoulders and moaned appreciatively as Hannibal began to suck, "but...I mean...you could also keep doing that and I wouldn't mind."

"I'm sure it won't take you any time at all to infer…" His teeth grazed Will's earlobes and his hands circled around his waist, smoothing down to unbutton his slacks and slide the zipper down.

Will pulled the jacket as close as he could without unhooking it from the hanging bar of the closet so he could inspect it. He located the embroidered insignia on a patch where the cyrillic stood out clearly above a star with the crossed hammer and sickle of the -- "KGB…" Will muttered before releasing the sleeve and letting the jacket fall from his grip. "Guess it fits, Lithuania…" he tilted his head back as Hannibal eased Will's erection out from the waistband of his briefs, "Lithuania in the 80s. You must have been...in your 20s?"

A small movement caught Will's attention out of the corner of his eye, but it was just a reflection in the mirror.

Hannibal nuzzled his cheek. "Would you like to see?" He didn't wait for a reply, shifting Will by his shoulder to face the mirror, and resuming his place nestled close behind him.

"See what?" Will wrapped his arm around the back of Hannibal's head and pulled him into a heated kiss. Their lips made wet sounds as Will licked into Hannibal's mouth. His other hand joined Hannibal's hands where they stroked Will's cock teasingly.

"Yourself," Hannibal murmured into the shell of his ear, "your pleasure." He held Will's cock in one hand, his fingers twisting with Will's, and traced the dark line of soft hair trailing up to his navel with the other. "Look."

Will's pleasure opened up before him like a ripening plum, tension giving way to languidness, furrowed brows to slackened lips, autumn pallor to a rosy flush.

With the mirror in front of him, Will felt a strangely uneasy feeling take hold. Once his attention was turned to their entwined image presented on the three panes of glass, all of his movements froze excepting involuntary ones like breathing. Even his pattern of blinking was slower.

First, he looked at Hannibal, because it was easier. Looking at himself in this situation seemed vain -- an action entirely more self-involved during sex than after washing his face in the morning. Hannibal, it seemed had no reservations about looking in the mirror. When Will's eyes met with Hannibal's through the middle pane, he saw contentment reflected back in warm whiskey shades.

As if Hannibal sensed Will's avoidance, he turned his glance downwards suggesting Will's should follow. Hannibal's hand was much less suggestive and much more demanding when it took Will's hand back up and wrapped it around the base of Will's nascent erection. In a delayed, meandering way, Will's eyes looked first at Hannibal's sculpted lips; they bowed flirtatiously with the pointed peak of them urging his gaze further along. Will resisted somewhat and followed the smooth line of his own naked shoulder all the way to the raised and shining scars gathered around his old bullet wound. His opposite arm gave a twitch as he felt an unexplained itch in the skin surrounding the hardened edges.

His gaze flickered momentarily towards his own face again when he felt warmth flooding up from his chest and neck to his cheeks -- effervescent and tickling at the seam of his lips. They parted, but he couldn't say anything and the only sound the action garnered was an indulgent chuckle from Hannibal behind him, followed by a doting peck to his cheek.

Will's attention was coaxed downwards by the rhythmic tensing and untensing of his very slight bicep. He swallowed thickly as his eyes traveled the easy path down his forearm where he looked at Hannibal's hand first, before noticing the skin of his own knuckles through the spaces between strong, surgical fingers.

"I'm guessing you want me to look...look at my dick," Will refocused his gaze in the center of the mirror and saw the whole picture that the two of them presented.

"If I were you, I would spend ages in front of this mirror," Hannibal sighed against his neck. "Lithe, young and lovely…" His palm began to work Will's cock as though milking him, squeezing from base to tip in slow pulsing motions.

"You're a big boy, too, aren't you Will?" A low, silky chuckle hummed in Will's ear. "I'm sure you've heard that from all the girls…"

He lifted Will's shaft and cupped his balls tenderly with his fingers, thumbing at the seam.

Will choked on the air in his lungs as Hannibal teased him verbally and physically. He blinked dazedly like a man who had just been hit soundly upside the head and did his best to recover. His attempts were made all the more futile as Hannibal played with his sack.

“I’ve never…mmmm!...particularly encouraged talking in partners,” He brought a hand up to his mouth and bit at the tips of his index and middle finger to temper his mounting feelings of arousal. “I - I...think people are generally less than proficient with their...fuck...their words when sex is involved.”

“Some people,” Hannibal provided; sex had never made him less verbal, nor any worse.

“Some people,” Will agreed while licking his lips.

“Others must have told you how spectacular you are,” Hannibal went on, peering over Will’s shoulder with keenly focused eyes, watching him writhe on his feet in the perfect center pane.

“I don’t...no. It just doesn’t come to mind,” Will thrust gently into Hannibal’s hand and turned his head hoping that Hannibal might kiss him, which he did, tickling Will’s tongue with his before pulling away with a nip.

“If only there really were two of you, hm?” he murmured, nodding to Will’s image opposite them. “Or two of me. How would you entertain two men at a time, Will? One in your mouth and...or both at once?”

As he spoke, spinning fantasies into the shell of Will’s ear, he slid his hand away from his balls and over the ridge of his hip, snaking down the cleft of his ass to softly press at his entrance.

“You’re being ridiculous,” Will replaced the hand that had been fussing with his balls with his own. “For one. Neither of us could stand two of either of us,” he tilted his head a little and watched intently as their mismatched hands worked his cock and balls in tandem.

“But if you really need to know…” Will broke his gaze away from his own body and locked eyes with Hannibal in the mirror, “...I’d get to both ways eventually.”

Hannibal gave him a firm knead, rewarding his candor. “Very good, Will,” he breathed, laving his tongue up the thrum of his jugular. “I’m sure you would excel at — anything you put your mind to.”

He lowered himself gracefully to his knees, caressing Will with just his fingertips as he sank to the floor. Once kneeling he opened him with his thumbs, parting his cheeks with the cradle of his hands before pressing his lips tenderly to Will’s opening.

“God, Hannibal!” For so many obvious reasons, Hannibal could be a very oral lover at times. Will was never surprised when Hannibal bit, licked, or sucked at various parts of his body, but he never became quite accustomed to the feeling of an eager mouth licking into his ass.

It took a moment for him to regain his balance without bending at the waist or backing up clumsily into Hannibal’s body crouched down on the floor, yet he managed with all the self-possession of a man determined to relieve work-related stress through sex.

And Hannibal held him still, always stronger than he seemed, though he seemed plenty strong; likewise through some preternatural perception he appeared to know just how

desperately Will needed what he was prepared to give him. He worked him open with his tongue, spearing and flaring inside him, relishing the shudders of his hips.

“Bed, do you think?” he asked at last, breath ghosting over Will’s wet entrance.

“I think wherever the fuck you want to shove your dick in me…” Hannibal swatted one of Will’s cheeks lightly and Will laughed good naturedly as he lazily jerked his own cock.

Will did not hesitate to follow when Hannibal pulled himself back up Will’s body and kissed him all the way back into Hannibal’s bedroom and over to Hannibal’s spacious bed.

There they fell into one another, Hannibal sighing into Will’s mouth and Will inviting him between his parted thighs, reclining onto his back and opening to him like a blossom. Now they could follow each other’s rhythms without missing a beat: Will knew that Hannibal always made the first thrust long and deep, knew he kept his pace all the more insistently when he was close because then it became harder for him; Hannibal knew that Will preferred depth over speed and that his orgasms were better when initiated from the inside.

Will came with a labored groan. Hannibal felt the fluttering of his muscles and timed his orgasm by those little contractions, counting the seconds in his mind. Will always lasted almost longer than he could bear; by the time Hannibal finished inside him and rolled aside, Will was panting shallowly, spent. His mind slowly sorted back into place as Hannibal turned onto his front and leaned to fiddle with something in the nightstand.

“Thanks for that,” Will rasped fondly.

“My pleasure.”

After a moment Will pushed up to peer over Hannibal’s shoulder. He was dexterously manipulating some slip of paper retrieved from an antique cigar box. When Will recognized it he smiled and relaxed again into the pillows.

“What a treat.”

“You were very tense.”

“So this is medicinal?”

“More so for you and less so for me.”

Hannibal leaned back against the headboard and Will watched him light the tip of the joint with some gleaming silver lighter. The earthy richness of the smoke reached him upon Hannibal’s exhale, and Will accepted his turn when offered.

“So,” Will sighed contentedly, “KGB, huh? Funny that’s never come up before.”

“Is it?” Hannibal let Will fit the blunt back against his lips.

“Woulda thought you’d have one or two good stories about it. Living history, and all.” This time, Will leaned in and placed his lips over Hannibal’s before he had the chance to exhale.

He sealed their mouths together and breathed thick smoke into his lungs from Hannibal's.

"I learned a few...needful skills," Hannibal replied, glazed with a warm tingle thanks to the brush of Will's lips.

"Didn't have you pegged for a commie," Will grinned, gesturing vaguely to their lush surroundings. Hannibal laughed.

"No, no. I was never a believer."

"What did you think, then?" It occurred to Will they had never talked about politics. It seemed somehow right to do it under the soft haze of good weed.

"I think," Hannibal breathed another cloud of smoke into the air, "that it takes more than theories and abstractions to bind a people into a nation."

"Abstractions...you mean, like, what? Liberty, equality, fraternity?"

"Exactly. They're insubstantial...like vapor to the ordinary person. And it's the ordinary person, incidentally, who is typically called to give his life for his nation."

"Uh-huh. So it takes more than an idea to make a country."

"Nobody goes to his death for Hegel."

"Keep talking like that, somebody might think you're a fascist."

"Mm," Hannibal plucked back the burnt-down blunt from Will's lips and shared another breath of smoke with him, cradling his soft throat in hand. "Where would they get such an idea?"

"I wonder," Will laughed. He took another drag, breathing out with a heady sigh. "Do you ever prescribe this to your patients?"

"This particular breed is purely for our enjoyment. I do have unorthodox prescription habits, if that's what you mean to ask."

"You didn't really strike me as the type…"

"What type is that?"

"Drugs are just sorta," Will gestured thoughtfully, "most people don't think of them as very high class."

"Ah, but only very recently. An item of sheer bourgeois puritanism, I'm afraid."

"Isn't it frowned upon in your professional circles?"

"Only by the provincial and unstudied. Sigmund Freud had a healthy cocaine habit, for instance."

“You respect Freud?”

“I respect his cocaine habit.”

Will laughed again, a warm, bubbling sound; he realized his muscles seemed to have loosened substantially, unbinding the tightness in his chest that had kept him from taking a full breath for what felt like days. His eyes closed in bliss and he breathed again.

“Thank you for this,” he said at last. Hannibal was watching him fondly, a soft smile lingering on his lips.

“The pleasure is all mine.”

It occurred to Will to say something then that he hadn’t before, but the words hung in his throat: Letting the first time it passed his lips be while he was thoroughly fucked out and high didn’t seem right. He wasn’t sure how Hannibal would react and he didn’t want to miss a cue thanks to dulled senses. Tension built inside him for a long moment before he looked away and sheepishly let the moment pass.

At work the next day, Will found his energy restored enough to search for military surplus stores in the general vicinity of where the family had been headed in Vermont. He found one, not at all to his surprise, in a little town on the edge of a vast swath of forest called Garnet Falls.

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